

India Street Neighborhood Study
Captain Reuben Baxter House
23 India Street
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-1051

HABS
MASS
10-NANT
75L-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
INDIA STREET NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY
CAPTAIN REUBEN BAXTER HOUSE

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Location: 23 India Street (on north side), Nantucket,
Massachusetts

Present Owner: Austin F. Tyrer

Present Occupants: Tyrer family.

Present Use: Residence

Brief Statement
of Significance: A typical Nantucket house extensively altered;
part of the India Street Neighborhood Study
(MASS-1013).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1795 -- John Jenkins and Perez Jenkins bought from George Lawrence "a piece of land in the Third Squadron of Wesco Acre Lots" for 27 pounds, 4 shillings and sixpence.
- 1800 -- John Jenkins and Perez Jenkins bought additional land from George Lawrence "adjoining on the east side of land sold them before, at a place called Micah's Pond" for \$84. This piece of land was wedge-shaped and only one foot wide on the street end.
- 1801 -- Captain Reuben Baxter bought from John and Perez Jenkins, housewrights, for \$1600. "dwelling-house which we at present occupy, together with all outhouses thereon".
- 1819 -- Alexander D. Bunker bought from Captain Reuben Baxter property in "the 3rd Squadron of Wesco Acre Lots" for \$1800.
- 1833 -- Alexander Russell, shipmaster, bought from Alexander D. Bunker for \$1800.
- 1855 -- Samuel C. Wyer, master Msriner, bought from Maria C. Russell, widow of Alexander Russell for \$400.
- 1872 -- Charlotte E. Morissey inherited from her father, Samuel C. Wyer.
- 1918 -- Bessie C. Winslow by will of Charlotte E. Morissey.
- 1919 -- Lizzie E. Benham and Eliza B. Thompson bought from Bessie C. Winslow.
- 1945 to date -- Austin F. Tyrer from Lizzie E. Benham and Eliza B. Thompson.

(Abstract: Records on file at Registry of Deeds,
Nantucket, Massachusetts.)

2. Date of erection: Soon after 1795. Land bought in 1795 and 1800 and sold with dwelling house in 1801. (Abstract: Book 14, Page 141 and Book 16, Page 475 Registry Deeds, Nantucket, Massachusetts.)
3. Architect: None. Built by housewrights.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: The possibility that this building may have been moved in from the old town of Sherburne has been considered, but no proof of this has been found.

Originally there was a recessed doorway on the side of the house fronting on India Street. House was square with kitchen in the main part.

5. Notes on alterations and additions: At some fairly recent time the doorway was changed from the south to the east side where the entrance is now located. A kitchen ell was added and shed ells in back of that. The chimney was removed around 1940.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

This house is located in that area originally described as the Third Squadron of Wesco Acre Lots, at a place commonly known by the name of Micah's Pond. India Street in the early 1800's was largely occupied by the wealthier families, many of whom derived large profit from the East India trade as well as from whaling. According to the Portfolio, written in 1811, it was first called India Row; later it became Pearl Street and still later the name was changed back to India Street. Westminster Street to the north was formerly called Clay Lane, and Micah's Pond extended from that area to the central part of India Street.

In the latter part of the eighteenth century George Lawrence owned a large tract of land in this vicinity and for several years sold lots on which houses were soon erected.

Captain Reuben Baxter was the first of four ship masters to own this house. He married Love Briggs in 1796 and it is probable that the house was built for them by the housewrights, two Jenkins brothers, who bought the land from George Lawrence in 1795. Captain Baxter was master of Ship Belvedere out of Nantucket, making two trips in 1815 and 1816 to the Patagonia whaling grounds off Brazil and Argentina for elephant oil.

The second captain to own the house was Alexander D. Bunker, master of Ships Brothers, Ontario, Zone, Clarkson and Panama, all making successful whaling voyages out of Nantucket between 1817 and 1836. In 1833 he sold the house to Captain Alexander Russell, who ran into hard luck after several voyages, when in 1824 his second mate, Ensign Rogers, was "drowned by a foul line" on his ship Sea Lion out of Nantucket.

In 1833 he made his second trip to the Pacific whaling grounds as master of Ship Wilmington and Liverpool Packet out of New Bedford, but because of illness had to leave his ship at Wahoo in the Sandwich Islands where he died of consumption in 1835 at the age of forty-three years. The depression years following the Great Fire of 1846 must have taken their toll for in 1855 his widow finally sold the house for only \$400. Although his family continued to live in the house for over twenty years, Captain Russell had only enjoyed living in the new home for a few month before he sailed on his last voyage on the Wilmington and Liverpool Packet.

The next owner, also a shipmaster, was Captain Samuel C. Wyer, who from 1840 to 1850 made voyages to the Pacific on Ships Alexander Coffin, Enterprise and Young Hero, all out of Nantucket. He returned home in 1855 from his last voyage and at that time was retiring from the sea and bought the India Street house. He was then forty-three years of age and had married Charlotte C. Coffin when he was thirty-two -- his first marriage, which took place after his first successful whaling voyage as master.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Old photograph of "Pearl Street" in Nantucket Illustrated, by A. Wittemann, New York; Albertype Co., 1888.

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin
Nantucket, Massachusetts
November, 1970

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the India Street Neighborhood Study (MASS-1013) made in the summer of 1970 by the Historic American Buildings Survey on Nantucket, Massachusetts. This is the fifth summer project of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Director was Professor F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A., of the University of Florida. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Jack E. Boucher of Linwood, New Jersey. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, August 1971.